

# Yellowstone National Park

## Bear Safety Brief

### *Bear Spray Series No. 2: Using Bear Spray To Deter An Aggressive Bear*

Bear spray is a non-lethal bear deterrent designed to stop aggressive behavior in bears. Capsicum, the active ingredient in bear spray is a strong irritant to the eyes, nose, mouth, throat, and lungs of bears. Bear spray has been proven to be a good defense against charging bears and has been effective in most reported cases where it has been used. Remember, no bear deterrent is 100% effective. Use proper bear avoidance safety techniques as your first line of defense!

- **PROVEN EFFECTIVE:** In a study in Alaska, bear pepper spray was effective in stopping aggressive behavior in grizzly bears in 92% of the incidents where it was used.
- **BETTER THAN A FIREARM:** Unlike with a firearm, you don't have to be a good shot with bear spray. All you need to do is put up a cloud of bear spray between you and the charging bear. Precise aiming is not necessary.
- **PRACTICE:** Use an inert bear spray to practice quick drawing bear spray from its holster, removing the safety tab with your thumb, and firing. Practice firing inert bear spray with the wind at your back, into a head wind, and with a cross-wind so that you understand how bear spray is affected by the wind.
- **BEAR SPRAY IS NOT A SUBSTITUTE FOR COMMON SENSE:** Bear pepper spray is not a substitute for caution. Use vigilance, bear encounter prevention methods, body language, and bear safety protocols as your first line of defense.
- **KEEP IT READILY ACCESSIBLE:** Bear spray must be immediately accessible in a quick draw holster, not stored in your pack. If your bear spray is not quickly accessible you will not have time to use it. Think of surprising a bear at a distance of 50 feet. The bear is charging at you at approximately 44 feet per second. You would not have time to pull your bear spray out of your pack.
- **WHEN TO SPRAY:** Start to spray the charging bear when it is about 40 - 50 feet away.
- **HOW TO SPRAY:** Point the bear spray nozzle toward the charging bear, aim slightly downward and using a slight side to side motion spray a 2 – 3 second blast so that the bear must pass through the cloud of bear spray before it gets to you. If the bear continues to charge, keep spraying until the bear changes direction. It is better to aim slightly low so the spray billows up off of the ground, than to aim too high possibly allowing the bear to run underneath the spray. If you have a strong cross-wind you will have to aim slightly up-wind so the spray drifts back in front of you. If you have a strong tail-wind it will carry the bear spray further giving you an added margin of safety. If you have a strong head-wind the spray will blow into your own face and incapacitate you. With a strong head-wind you may consider not using your bear spray and instead relying solely on standing your ground, then playing dead if the bear makes contact (**Caution!** do not play dead with a curious or predatory bear).
- **LEAVE THE AREA PROMPTLY AFTER USE:** After you spray a bear with bear spray you should promptly leave the area as the effects of the bear spray will eventually wear off.
- **KNOW ITS LIMITATIONS:** Bear spray is adversely affected by below freezing temperatures, strong winds, heavy rain or snow, and age. These factors may reduce the distance and duration that bear spray will spray. Check the expiration date on your bear spray. Properly dispose of expired bear spray.